

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) today questioned why House Republicans, who say they want to increase domestic oil supply, blocked a measure that would have promoted responsible drilling in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) and on land already leased to companies for production, but which is not currently being drilled. The bill - the Drill Responsibly in Leased Lands (DRILL) Act - was defeated this afternoon by a vote of 244 - 173 under suspension of the rules, which requires a two-thirds majority.

“Drill Responsibly in Leased Lands. With Americans being pummeled by \$4 a gallon gas, it is high time America did just that,” said Rep. Hoyer. “However, after months of suggesting that the only answer to bring down gas prices is more drilling, House Republicans today showed their true colors by blocking the DRILL Act - a bill which would have decisively and responsibly increased domestic oil production.”

Specifically, the DRILL Act would speed up the leasing process of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A), an area of land west of the federally-protected Alaska National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) that contains an estimated 10.6 billion barrels of oil to ANWR's 10.4 billion. The bill also incorporates the ‘Use It or Lose It’ legislation, which simply requires oil producers to drill on the leases they already have or relinquish them so that another company can produce the oil there. Finally, it would call on the President to use the powers of his office to facilitate the completion of Alaskan oil and gas pipelines, so products will get to market sooner, and it ensures that Alaskan oil will fill American gas tanks, not be exported to other countries.

“In addition to promoting responsible drilling, this bill tells the oil companies to drill on the leases they have, or let somebody else do it - but don't just sit on them while Americans are paying \$4 a gallon,” stated Hoyer. “I see no reason to give even more handouts of public land to companies enjoying record profits and billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies. Let them start on the land they already have, which will bring oil to the market more quickly.”

Oil and gas companies currently hold leases to 68 million acres of federal land and the Outer Continental Shelf on which they are not producing oil and gas. Eighty-one percent of estimated oil and gas resources on federal lands and waters are already available for development - 311 million acres. These reserves are equal to 107 billion barrels of oil and 658 trillion cubic feet of natural gas - more than 14 years of current U.S. oil consumption (7.5 billion barrels per year).

“Oil and gas companies currently have access to more than eighty percent of oil and gas resources on federal lands and waters,” stated Hoyer. “We need to focus on developing the extensive resources currently available before opening up additional land for drilling. And we need to look to investing more in alternatives, which are critical to our long-term, sustainable energy future.”

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